

Sleep Safe

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Summary: A young Alyx Vance has the same fears as any other 6 year old, only this time, her dad isn't there to comfort her when bad dreams get too real

Sleep Safe

She was roused by a noise.

Gripping to her covers, holding them up to her face as she peered over them to look at the small window, little Alyx Vance kept her lips tightly shut as she waited for the scratching to subside. She was used to the strange hum in the ceiling and the far off thumping of what she assumed were the footfalls of the soldiers that never stopped moving.

But the scratching was new.

All her mind could do was tell her it was the long claw like fingers of the monsters in her dreams. She clutched her cover tighter, burying her face in the musty material as she wished her daddy was in the next room. That was enough to keep her eyes from searing with tears as the noises got louder. But he wasn't next door. He wasn't in the building the group were couped up in. Missing trains and lots of people forced them apart and for her to be on her own.

The only things she knew were that she was on her own, and there was only one other person she knew.

A large scrape rasped down the window. Alyx flung herself under the sheets and curled up and began to hum, hugging her knees as tightly as she could.

Must be brave, don't cry, must be brave, don't cry, must be-

The noise got worse as she heard the wind pick up, whistling through

the gaps in the brickwork.

Whimpering slightly, she got out of bed, pulled her covers with her and hurried out into the corridor.

Closing her door, she slowly made her way down the dark hall and sat in the corner, knowing if there was anything there, she would see it. She would see it and run.

Sniffing and pressing her palms against her brow, she sat letting the darkness surround her as she forced back tears.

\* \* \*

><p>He was roused by a noise.</p>

Blinking awake, Barney Calhoun propped himself up and stared in the direction of the door. He could have sworn he'd heard someone's door closeâ€|

Frowning, he sat up properly and rubbed his neck. It had been nearly a week and a half since the split of the refugee group and the horizon was looking fairly bleak as to whether the broken party was going to be able to join back up en route. It didn't help that the groups had parts of families in each, including the Vances. Problem was, Alyx was the youngest by nearly 7 years. Poor kidâ€|

Barney got up and went over to his door, concentrating on the noises out in the hallway. Someone was padding about. He waited for a moment to hear a door open and close once againâ€| but nothing.

Opening the door, he peered out and down the hallway. Squinting to allow his sleep addled eyes to focus better through the gloom, he could just make out a small shape down the opposite end of the corridor.

Kicking his boot over to the door and propping it open, he walked down the hallway but slowed up when he heard the hiccupping breathes of-

Oh shit, the poor kid was crying.

"Alyx?" He asked quietly as he continued to walk over.

The little girl's head sprang up, eyes wide and glistening as she looked at him.

"What're you doin' out here?"

Alyx just sniffed and hugged her bedsheet. Barney's face just fell as he stopped and crouched down to her. "Heyâ€| what's up?"

The girl sniffed and wiped her eyes. "Nothing."

"Nothin'? You're in the hallway, kiddo."

Alyx looked down at her lap and sniffed again.

Tipping his head, he looked back down the hallway and towards her room then back to her. "Is it too dark?" he asked, keeping his voice

low and as soft as he could.

She shook her head. "It's the noise."

"A noise?"

Alyx nodded silently and caught a sob which came out as a small hiccup. "Scratching at my window."

Barney frowned slightly. It was probably that goddamn tree that had decided to grow everywhere making the ground floor uninhabitable. "Come and show me."

When Alyx didn't move, Barney stood up and held out a hand. "It's freezin' out here, sweetheart. Show me what the problem is."

Looking at Barney, Alyx swallowed back another small sob and stood up, clutching her bedsheets still. It seemed like she reluctantly took his hand, but as soon as he held hers back, she grasped it like a lifeline and led him towards her room.

As they got to the door, Barney stood in front of her and pushed the door open, giving her hand a little squeeze before stepping in.

It was silent.

Peering around Barney, Alyx looked at the window and prayed it would in fact make the noiseâ€¦ purely so he would believe her.

"It was scratching. Like claws." She said quietly, voice muffled by the material she was holding up to her face.

"I know, kiddo, I know." He said calmly and stepped towards the window.

A large repetitive scrape emanated from behind the glass pane. Whimpering, Alyx grabbed Barney's forearm. "Is it one of those things?"

Barney peered out and saw it was, in fact, the tree. \_Goddamn treeâ€\_|\_

He looked down at her and shook his head. "It's a tree that's grown too big."

Alyx froze, and slowly her grip on his arm loosened. "A too big tree?"

Barney nodded. "A \_too \_big tree."

Looking at the girl's face, he could have sworn he saw her think the entire thing through. "I thought it was a claw monster."

"A what?"

"Claw monster."

Barney sighed and patted her shoulder. "Come on. Back to bed."

"They have long claws instead of hands." She said quietly as she

clambered back onto the bed, pulling the bedsheets over herself.

Barney straightened the covers and frowned. Where on earth had she seen a headcrab victimâ€| "Where have you seen those, Alyx?" he said, sitting on the side of the bed.

"When I fall asleep. They're always there."

Poor kid.

"Every night, you dream of them?" Barney said, not able to hide the pity and anxiousness over what this little girl's subconscious was throwing at her. And when the little girl nodded, his heart sank. "Why didn't you say?"

Alyx suddenly looked very uncomfortable. Twisting the material of her night top in her hands, she looked to the side, blinking back tears. "Because you're Unco Barney and Unco Barney isn't scared, so I can't be scared."

\_Wellâ€| shit.\_

Barney took her hand and gave it a squeeze.

"Oh sweetheart, no, you are allowed to be scared. Just because others don't look like they are, don't mean they aren't."

Alyx looked at him and blinked, letting the pools of tears overflow and trickle down her cheeks. "I don't like being scared."

Barney wiped away her tear off her cheek with his thumb. "I know. I don't like being scared either."

"You don't?"

"No I don't."

"You get scared?"

Barney nodded and gave her a reassuring smile. "Everyone does."

Alyx sniffed and got up on her knees and scooted over to him. "So, you get as scared as me?"

Tipping his head, he chuckled. "Sometimes, yes. But I've seen far, far more than you have, and I'm not scared of a lotta things. But that's my job. I'm here to make sure you're safe, kiddo." He said prodding her cheek lightly. "And if you feel scared again, you tell me, ok?"

Alyx nodded "ok."

"Because if you hide it, no one can make ya feel better. Right?"

"Right." Alyx said, nodding more vigorously.

Barney nodded along with her and stood up. "Right. Sleep time." But as he went to leave, Alyx touched his arm. "Hmm?"

Looking at the window anxiously, Alyx then peered up at him. "I'm still scared."

Barney then looked at the window, then to Alyx. "Would you like me to stand guard?"

Alyx shook her head and Barney did a double take. "Oh?"

She continued to shake her head. "I want a hug and you to stand guard."

Barney smiled and tapped her knee. "Ok. Shift over." Alyx moved and as soon as Barney had sat down next to her, wrapped her small arms around his torso and got as close to him as possible, as if snuggling her way to safety. A little surprised, Barney gently put his arm around her and hugged her back. "Now go to sleep, ok?"

Alyx hummed a yes. "Will you sleep?"

"Not until the tree is gone, Alyx." Barney sighed and rested his head back against the wall.

Silence consumed the room. The humming from the ceiling seemed to melt into the far reaches of their hearing and the scratching never returned as the wind subsided. Barney was about to drop off when-

"Unco Barney."

"Hmmm?"

"Do you have dreams about claw monsters."

Giving her a sleep numbed hug, he nodded. "I have bad dreams as well."

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault." Barney murmured, sleep pulling him away from conscious thought.

"Someone has to say sorry."

Barney was silent for a moment before turning to look at her. "Thank you Alyx. And I'm sorry for your dreams."

"Thank you Unco Barneyâ€|" She barely got the words out before she dozed off, finally comfortable enough to fall asleep.

Confident the little girl by his side was in her well-deserved slumber, he too allowed himself to succumb to a deep sleep.

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><p>Barney opened one eye as he saw his bedroom door open in the middle of the next night. He wished for a full night's sleep just one night, but he doubted it would ever happen. It hadn't happened in the last 4 years, why change that habit?<p>

Suddenly, he felt a small body crawl onto the bed and wriggle its way up to him and under his arm. He was about to throw a fit thinking some crazy-ass monster had managed to work out who to use a doorknob when he realised it was Alyx.

"Alyx wha- Alyx what are ya doin'?"

"Giving you a hug."

"Why?"

"Because you have bad dreams. So I thought you might need one today."

That goddamn tree is at it again I swearâ€| if it keeps scaring her, I'll pull it down with my teethâ€|

Barney sighed and wrapped his arm around her more tightly. "Thanks kiddo."

End  
file.